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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the teacher's role in contemporary English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in Taiwan. Key figures in this exploration are Confucius, Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu, Socrates, and Plato. The paper explains how the power of the student meets the power of the teachers. Students' power flows through their freedom and responsibility to accept or reject the teacher's content, style, and person. The more students accept, the more students learn. The more students learn, the more they consent to die in transformations mediated by the teacher. Teachers' power flows through their ability to kill the illusional student composed of ignorance, bad habits, inattention, lack of self-control, and lack of discipline constituted by prior experiences. Teachers' caederic powers depend entirely on the extent to which they have committed the necessary killings in their own lives. Such dyings and killings are presented in terms of the compulsory, the customary, and the authentic. The paper concludes that contemporary Taiwan ESL classrooms are sites where learning as dying and teaching as killing are necessary, possible, and desirable. The paper lays out the dynamic of this "edudrama" with the help of Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Socrates, and Plato. (Contains 10 references.) (Author/SM)

To Learn, To Die/To Teach, To Kill: The Role of the Teacher in Contemporary Taiwan ESL Classrooms

by David Cornberg, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a view of the role of the teacher in a contemporary Taiwan ESL classroom that includes the wisdom of the past and of the future. The key figures who lead us through this exposition are Confucius, Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu, Socrates and Plato. The content of this paper explicates the paper's rather unusual title. Specifically, the power of the student meets the power of the teacher. The power of the student flows through their freedom and responsibility to accept or reject the teacher's content, style and person. The more the student accepts the more the student learns. The more the student learns the more the student consents to die in transformations mediated by the teacher. The power of the teacher flows through the teacher's ability to kill the illusory person composed of ignorance, bad habits, inattention, lack of self-control and lack of discipline constituted by the student's prior experience. The teacher's caedric power, however, depends directly on the extent to which the teacher has committed the necessary killings in their own lives. Such dyings and killings are presented here in terms of the compulsory, the customary and the authentic. The contemporary Taiwan ESL classroom is a site in which learning as dying and teaching as killing are necessary, possible and desirable. This paper lays out the dynamic of this edudrama with the help of Confucius, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Socrates and Plato. The dynamic presented is an example of itself so that the practice of the theory here is an invitation that signifies the reader.

The Dao and Dying

The Master said: If you hear the dao in the morning, you may die in the evening. (Ware 30-1)

I have not died. Many evenings have passed and still I live to write, teach and learn. It does not follow from my not having died that I have not heard the dao. Rather, Confucius wrote that you may die, not that you must. Confucius therefore allows for the possibility that some who have heard the dao might choose to live within its memory, to teach from within its aura, rather than to leave the life that was blessed by its illumination. Confucius allowed for the benevolence of Kuan Yin who knows but does not go, who sees but does not sleep, who hears and keeps on listening.

So it is with a teacher who understands that learning English is a path of power for contemporary residents of Taiwan, young and old alike. Learning English is a path of power because English is the dominant power language in our time. Whether it comes from Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Guam, the United States, Canada, England,

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Scotland, South Africa or any other country whose official language is English, beyond those borders English is the common tongue of international discourse. The path of Taiwan's internationalization is the path of Taiwan's ascendancy. This path leads to a role in the play of nations like the small fulcrum upon which larger weights must find their balance. The north-south ridge of mountains rising from a sea of possibility that girds Taiwan gives it a shape like a fine, smoothly tapered wedge whose gradual entrance moves masses many times its own weight. This path is replete with English signs.

The signs of English are the signifiers that lead the student's gaze from inattention to attention, from silence to voice, from inchoate to well written, from bewildered to comprehension. In Pre-School, there are letters with the eyes of lions, the tails of dragons and the voices of bears, flowers, butterflies and cats. In Kindergarten there are large and small letters whose transformation points beyond spelling to grammar. In the elementary grades there is an increasing complication of realities that leads from the rainbow surfaces of letters to the many-storied fables within the heart of English fantasy. In the Junior High School years, the heart of fantasy drives the development of the four skills to the precipitous levels of conversational speech and reflective composition. The high school years witness the emergence of two steady streams, one flowing through the creative juice of rhyme, song, story and poem, the other through the critical crystals of rhetoric and composition. In the undergraduate years, a heavy, complicated coat of dense colors outfits the growing individuality of style, content, voice, audience and technics. In graduate school, the signs lead to the dense articulations and precise formulations of specializations whose specificity continually refines the lines of the vehicle still designated by the single name "English."

Such a path of study, echoing the incessant self-correction of faults embodied in the zeal of Confucius, requires that ESL teachers prepare for, undergo and officiate at many small deaths. The first is the self-inflicted execution of their own inability to distinguish between substandard, customary English and authentic, idiomatic English. Substandard, customary English is the English concocted by non-Native speakers and shot full of errors with articles, prepositions, tenses, pronouns, conjunctions, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. It becomes the custom—the customary English—because it is never systematically subjected to ruthless gleaning by native English speakers. Having lodged itself in the power position of the minds of local teachers of English, this patois rises to the further, more prestigious status of the compulsory. More than customary it becomes the English of the required curriculum—in Pre-Schools, in Kindergartens, and at every level of the public and private Taiwan educational system, a ludicrous collection of errors passes itself off as correct written and spoken English.

Sword Swallowers and Sword Wielders

Enter the sword swallowers and sword wielders.

**To know people is wisdom;
To know self is enlightenment.**

**The master of people has power;
The master of self is strong.**

**Being content is wealth.
Enforcing oneself has determination.**

**Who doesn't lose their place endures;
To die without perishing is long life.
(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching #33)**

The sword swallows cut away the error-laden masses of English verbiage from their own comprehension and production skills. They ask the specific questions of formal correctness and idiomatic fluency about their own little English possessions and gladly let those that do not give appropriate answers die. Those perishings of substandard English possessions release energy for the longer life of correct, idiomatic English. The sword swallows die without perishing.

The sword wielders speak and write English that presents by example correct idiomatic English. The sword wielders do not attempt to give rules for every English verbal gesture. They know that English is a living synthesis of many languages whose differing pronunciations and constructions have together created a language with many irregularities. Instead, the sword wielders continually refer the question of proper English to the English that is actually, now being spoken and written. For example, English grammar texts present the semi-colon as a means for joining two independent clauses. In present practice, however, many writers have stopped using semi-colons in their writing and the editors of many journals and magazines have stopped allowing them in their articles. Again, all grammar texts assert that two independent clauses joined by a comma constitute a run-on sentence. In present practice, however, many writers join relatively short independent clauses with only a comma and the editors of many journals allow this kind of punctuation in stories and articles in their journals.

There are at least two reasons for these changes. First, both changes decrease the time needed to read and understand articles. Second, both changes simplify the processes of writing and printing articles. The two values of speed and simplicity conjoin to compress written English into a simpler, swifter vehicle.

But the sword swallows and wielders must be able to distinguish and manipulate the various registers of spoken and written English. They must be able to distinguish among compulsory, customary and authentic language use and especially speech.

Compulsory speech is the speech of a subject who is spoken by a speech community that exists prior to the subject, in time and in space, and that becomes the subject's language (Silverman 162-7; Lacan 2, 23, 70-1). For example, the speech of a family is compulsory

speech for an infant. The speech of a school curriculum is compulsory speech for a student. (Lacan 25-29)

Customary speech is the speech of a subject who is spoken by a speech community that responds partially to the creative ability of the subject in its formation. For example, the speech of young people in their childhood and adolescent groups is customary speech. This kind of speech participates in the encompassing and penetrating compulsory speech of the adults but includes variations created by the young people themselves. The speech of gossip among residents of neighborhoods, districts and areas is also customary speech. Such regional speech may even gain the stability and complexity of a recognizable pidgin or dialect.

Authentic speech is the speech not of a subject but of an I—a first person who has temporarily suspended the hegemony of either compulsory or customary speech and thereby found a voice whose use may be unrecognizable in either the compulsory or customary registers. Authentic speech contains the possibility of its own recognition within it, however, because it creates a space in which it is possible for the other who hears the I to become an authentic I. That becoming may then allow a response, rather than a reaction, in the initiation of dialogue whose condition is awareness of distance between the speech of dialogue and the talk of either custom or compulsion.

There is no particular format for authentic language use. It might be tempting to consider some kinds of creative writing authentic, such as poetry, song, or drama, if it were not for the fact that most writers in these genres do not create anything more than insignificant variations on either established forms, such as sonatas and sonnets, or the customary speech of past writers.

How, then, is authentic language use to be understood? Traces may be gleaned from the etymology of the word *authentic* in the Oxford English Dictionary which shows a pattern of meanings in ancient Greek such as “of first-hand authority, original,” “original authority,” “one who does a thing himself [/herself], a principal, a master, an autocrat”(570). An autocrat, moreover, is a person who is self-powered—from *autos*, self, and *krates*, power. Authentic speech is thus an example of the kind of language used by Lao-Tzu’s master of the self as described in #33 above.

Indeed, the sword swallows and sword wielders would agree with Confucius:

Standard-setting directives must be followed, but the important thing is self-reformation. The words of appointment to a post are pleasing, but the important thing is self-reflection. There is nothing I can do about cases of satisfaction without self-reflection, or of compliance without self-reformation. (Ware 86-8)

Student Initiatives

But everyone is born into a family and into a community of natural language. Everyone is taken in and filled out by the compulsory and customary language usages of their birth

time and place. How then can anyone achieve authentic language use? How can anyone gain enough distance from the compulsory and the customary to be authentic? How can anyone who learns English in contemporary Taiwan create in their linguistic space boundaries strong enough to hold back the consensual incompetence of compulsory and customary Taiwan English long enough to develop idiomatic competency?

Here are some answers to those questions from real life. Since I arrived in Taiwan in July of 1998, I have had opportunities to meet and talk with many different kinds of people. Among them have been the five best speakers of English whom I have yet met here. Four of them were females, one was male. Three of the females and the male were out of school and working in regular, full-time jobs in Taipei. One of the females was a student in one of my fall 1998 courses. When I heard them speak English, and heard them respond to my spoken English, I felt that their pronunciation, diction and syntax were all nearly idiomatic and that their listening comprehension was comparable to that of a native speaker.

They shared with me the following common facts about their mastery of conversational English. First, none of them had achieved their mastery in any kind of school—public, private, cram or otherwise. Second, none of them had studied English abroad. Third, all of them had had a personal interest in learning English that was authentically theirs and not a function of schools, peer groups or any other external compulsion or motivation. At this point, their stories diverged in interesting ways. The two older people, the male and one of the females, shared with me that they had learned their English primarily in the course of doing their jobs that required regular, intense and repeated communication with native speakers of English. The three younger people, the other females, shared with me the following techniques they had devised for themselves. All told me that they had had inadequate opportunities to speak English in their public school classes. None of them had attended cram schools. Two told me that, starting in Junior High School, they had made themselves read all of their English homework aloud. The other told me that she talked aloud to herself. All affirmed that they had devised these practices on their own, without promptings or suggestions from others, and that they had used them repeatedly over the years of their studying English as public school students.

With great motivation and will power, they severed part of their educational process from the mass of their fellow students and colleagues. They learned the hard way that there is no excellence without solitude. There is no excellence in language use without a deliberate immersion in its demands. With the sword of independence they cut their way out of the mesh of mediocrity.

In a second language learning situation that tends to drag all learners towards a mediocre median, what is an ESL teacher? A sword and a shield. In conversation, speech and drama classes, for example, teachers quickly realize that most of their students cannot consistently and clearly make the English sound "th," as in "the," "this," "that," "then," "thought," "through," and "another." This sound is not in Chinese but, in one way or another, it is in almost every English sentence. As a sound in English "th" has no particular social significance, but as a gesture in Chinese, protruding the tongue out

between the teeth can signify disgust. This facial gesture, with no accompanying spoken words, is firmly established in the compulsory and customary registers of contemporary Chinese child-rearing and interpersonal relations.

In my experience as a speech teacher, many students who are juniors in college cannot clearly make the "th" sound. Many of them experience great discomfort and difficulty when they try to separate their upper and lower teeth and protrude their tongues far enough beyond the edges of their teeth to distinguish clearly between "t" and "th". The compulsory wrappings of etiquette around the social appearance of the tongue and the customary layerings of pronunciation embedded in the muscles of the tongue, jaw and throat do not easily give up their grips. Hence the sword. The student must also be protected from real or imagined censure and ridicule for re-positioning such a forceful gesture in the phoneme of another tongue. Hence the shield.

The Skill of Ting

As life has a limit, so knowledge has no limit, and to accompany the unlimited with the limited is dangerous indeed! I simply know this and nothing more! Because fame does not approach virtue, and punishment does not approach vice, take as your classic standard following the center....(Chuang Tzu, The Sayings of Chuang Tzu, Chapter 3: Preservation of Life Takes Precedence)

Chuang Tzu makes a very interesting pun in this passage. He uses the Chinese character “經” that has a family of signifieds such as classic books, experience, regulate, rule, standard and conduct. His pun is doubly ironic and reflexive. It is ironic first because it shows that the man who wonders about being a butterfly has indeed a strong sense of the limits and dangers of life. But his sense draws attention to the present, wherein we must navigate the world's obstacles and negotiate the world's relationships. So far from pointing us to old books, he takes the initiative away from Confucius' insistence on the written word as our primary guide and points instead toward a center that can be achieved only by living persons with their own effort. But the effort is ironic again because it turns the reader away from the written word of Chuang Tzu himself toward a kind of skill or competency that he then illustrates with the story of Butcher Ting. The pun is reflexive because the reader is given a general direction—follow the center—but no specific teachings as to how to do it. Rather, the reader must rely on their own resources to interpret the story and reflexively apply it to their own life.

“Butcher Ting was one day splitting an ox for Lord Wen-Hui. Wherever his hand touched the ox, or his shoulder leaned against it, or his foot trod upon it, or his knee kneeled against it, there was ripping or tearing and a zinging of the knife. It sounded just right....“Splendid!” said his sovereign, “How did you ever achieve such skill?”

Laying aside his knife, the butcher replied, “Through my fondness for the dao, I have progressed in my art. When I first split oxen, I could see nothing but whole

oxen, but after three years of practice I never saw the ox as a whole. Now I proceed by intuition and do not look with my eyes, for when a sense organ ceases to function, the inner gods take over. Relying upon the natural arrangement of its body, I strike the big cavities and pass through the large crevices. Following such sure things—the veins, arteries, and tendons are never touched at all—the big bones go untouched that much the more! Your best butcher will change his knife once a year for the cutting it has been doing, and your common butcher will change his every month, because he has been breaking bones with it. But I have used this knife for nineteen years during which I have cut up thousands of oxen, and the edge is still as good as the day it left the grindstone. You must realize that there is a crevice in every joint, but the edge of my knife has no thickness at all. When such an edge enters a crevice, the latter is wide, wide open to it as it moves, so there is room to spare. That is why after nineteen years the edge of my knife is as good as the day it left the grindstone. Nevertheless, whenever I come upon a complicated spot, I recognize the difficulties it presents and I proceed with caution. I fix my gaze and go slowly. Then, with very slight movements of the knife, it comes apart as though it were a mote of earth thrown to the ground. Then standing with knife in hand, I look all about me elatedly. After that, I wipe the knife and put it away.

“Splendid! Your words help me to keep life going.”

(Ware 30-32)

Let us suppose that Ting is a fluent speaker of English as a second language rather than a butcher. We may then rewrite his story as follows:

Ting was one day speaking with Lord Wen-Hui. Whenever he spoke a word, or uttered a sentence, or delivered a paragraph, or recited a line of poetry, there were clear consonants and vowels and the rhythm of natural speech. It sounded just right....“Splendid!” said his sovereign, “How did you ever achieve such skill?” Laying aside a book, Ting replied, “Through my fondness for the dao, I have progressed in my art. When I first heard English, I could hear nothing but a rush of garbled sound, but after years of practice I never heard that garbled rush again. Now I proceed by intuition and do not fumble with my ears or stumble with my tongue, for when a language is thoroughly learned, its own rhythm takes over. Relying upon the natural arrangement of its syntax, I place the verbs and connect the prepositions. Following such sure things—the capitals, articles, and conjunctions are never misplaced at all—the dependent and independent clauses flow smoothly that much the more! Your best ESL user will increase their vocabulary once in awhile, and your mediocre user will never increase it, because they do so little with the language. But I have used this language for many years during which I have spoken thousands of complete sentences, and my vocabulary is still growing like that of your best first year student. You must realize that there is a difference between every sound, but my tongue has no hesitation at all. When such a tongue utters a sound, the latter comes clearly and effortlessly, so that the differences from the other sounds are distinct and natural. That is why after many years my tongue is as agile as the day I first began to learn English. Nevertheless, whenever I come upon a complicated construction, I recognize the

difficulties it presents and I proceed with caution. I center my mind and go slowly. Then, with very slight movements of the tongue, an utterance comes forth as though it were a bright fish in a clear stream. Then hearing my own voice speak the proper sounds, I look all about me elatedly. After that, I smile and move on to the next task."

"Splendid! Your words help me to keep life going."

But for life to keep going, something must die. The oxen die to become food for the preservation of human life. What must die to preserve learning English as a second language? The old life of ignorance, inattention and lack of discipline must die for the new life of English competency to be born and flourish. Besides these qualities common to excellence in all kinds of learning, the error-laden actual habits of non-idiomatic English must be cut away from the bones of potential to allow the new flesh of idiomatic English to gain purchase and nutriment. The teacher must wield the sword and tip the watering can. The sword frees students from error. The watering can—the nurturing love that a teacher has for the heart of learning and for the learning heart—continually prompts, corrects and forgives to allow students another chance to achieve. The teacher nurtures, the teacher models by using English idiomatically, and the teacher gives another chance by forgiving then requiring the student to repeat until they have mastered the task. Nurturing love decreases punishment and negative reinforcement while increasing reward for good achievement. Nurturing love also increases the patience the teacher must have to help students gain the patience they must have for the years of repetition that Ting underwent to achieve his skill.

The Necessity of Memory

The task, the goal, the direction, the dao of the activity is helping the student create another center of language that is as natural in use as the center of their first language. This creation requires clarity, flexibility and strength of memory. But what is to be remembered?

Chuang Chou was strolling in Tiao-ling park when he noticed a strange bird fly in from the south. Its wings had a spread of seven feet, and its eyes were an inch in diameter. After brushing against Chuang Chou's brow it settled in the chestnut grove. "What sort of bird is that?" asked Chuang Chou. "With wings as large as that, it does not keep going, and with eyes as big as that, it does not see straight!" He lifted his skirt and ran. With his bow taut, he waited. Then he noticed a solitary cicada so intent upon having found a fine spot of shade that it forgot to protect itself, so a mantis, its forelegs already poised, seized it. But, intent upon the capture, the latter forgot to protect itself. The strange bird then took advantage of the situation, and in the course of profiting from it, forgot about its own true nature, and could have easily been shot. Chuang Chou was so astonished by all this that he remarked, "Alas! Things are certainly enmeshed with one another. These two things have brought harm to one another." Then throwing aside his bow he left the scene. A gamekeeper ran after him shouting insults, for he thought he had been poaching.

Chuang Chou went back home and stayed there for three months without coming into the court. Later, when a pupil, Lin Chu, asked why the master had not come out even for a short time, Chuang Chou replied, "I was so bound up in things that I forgot about myself. Having been looking into murky water, I was blinded by the clear stream. I was taught by my master that one adapts to environment, and today, as I was strolling in Tiao-ling, I was forgetting all about myself. Then a strange bird brushed against my brow, went off into the chestnut grove, and forgot about its own true self. The grove's gamekeeper took me for a poacher. That is why I did not come into court." (Ware 242-44)

The world is no safer, things are no less enmeshed, and language is often no less murky now than it was when Chuang Tzu lived and wrote. It is no more uncommon now than it was then to hear someone use a second language poorly. It is no more difficult now than it was then for a user of a second language to be blinded by the clear stream of idiomatic reality. Indeed, developing and strengthening memory may be the most important part of achieving the naturalness of Ting's skill.

The dao of Ting is the center of Chuang Tzu. The center of Chuang Tzu is the self of the student. The signified of the self, of course, is no one, nobody and nothing. It is the freedom of attention from attachment that distracts from learning. It is the transparent awareness that disappears when the cicada forgets, when the mantis forgets, when the bird forgets and when Chuang Tzu forgot. But how then, are memory and learning related? Let us hear Socrates through Plato:

Socrates: ...It isn't that, knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself. So with virtue now. I don't know what it is. You may have known before you came into contact with me, but now you look as if you don't. Nevertheless I am ready to carry out, together with you, a joint investigation and inquiry into what it is.

Meno: But how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don't know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn't know?

Socrates: I know what you mean. Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man [sic] cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.

Meno: Well, do you think it is a good argument?

Socrates: No.

Meno: Can you explain how it fails?

Socrates: I can. I have heard from men and women who understand the truths of religion...

Meno: What did they say?

Socrates: Something true, I thought, and fine.

Meno What was it, and who were they?

Socrates. Those who tell it are priests and priestesses of the sort who make it their business to be able to account for the functions which they perform.... What they say is this—see whether you think they are speaking the truth. They say that the human soul is immortal. At one time it comes to an end—that which is called death—and at another is born again, but is never finally exterminated. On these grounds a person must live all their days as righteously as possible....

Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a person has recalled a single piece of knowledge—*learned* it, in ordinary language—there is no reason why they should not find out all the rest, if they keep a stout heart and do not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection.

We ought not then to be lead astray by the contentious argument you quoted. It would make us lazy, and is music in the ears of weaklings. The other doctrine produces energetic seekers after knowledge, and being convinced of its truth, I am ready, with your help, to inquire into the nature of virtue. (Plato 363-4)

In his dialogue, *Meno*, Plato situates Socrates in a conversation with a bright young sophist named "Meno." They begin to discuss the nature of virtue with Socrates asking questions that Meno answers until Meno experiences such confusion, such *aporia*, that he cannot continue. It is at this point in the dialogue that the possibility of knowing what you know or don't know arises and elicits from Socrates the assertion that "seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection". A more direct translation from the Greek is that learning is *anamnesis*. This word separates into two parts—*ana*, back, and *mnesis*, to call to mind. The Latin-based English word "recollection" is therefore adequate but not as precise as the Greek word. The Greek word centers learning in a mental action that requires "energetic" seeking. The energetic seeking echoes Ting's search for the joints in the body of the oxen that he knows are there. With gestures perfected by practice he moves as effortlessly as a native speaker speaks their own language.

From this point of view, learning without memory is impossible. Memory without the incisive reflection necessary for the clean removal of the obstacles of distraction is impossible. Consistently distinguishing between distraction and lesson, without teaching that both requires and exemplifies following the center, is impossible. Following the center without the dying of inattention and the killing of distraction is impossible. Learning and teaching must share the transparent awareness of forgetful attention.

The Qualities of Interaction

But sharing between teacher and student positions the teacher in contemporary Taiwan ESL classrooms as a participant in a special kind of interaction. Some of the psychological qualities of that interaction, such as lack of contentiousness and energetic seeking, are mentioned by Socrates in the passage quoted above. In other dialogues, such

as the Protagoras, the Republic and the Gorgias, Plato expands the psychological qualities to include leisure as a socio-psychological condition. The English word "leisure" translates the Greek word "scholē" that is in turn the origin of the English word "school." In Plato's time, having leisure meant that you were not continually engaged in the survival activities of providing food, water, clothing, shelter, heat and protection against enemies. You had time to place your body in a situation with others who were also not busy with survival activities. In contemporary Taiwan ESL classrooms, the necessities of life have been fulfilled and the focus is on teaching and learning.

But Plato is also at pains to point out that certain attitudes and behaviors, such as contentiousness and laziness, can still obstruct teaching and learning. The role of the teacher therefore includes bearing the primary responsibility for creating and maintaining an optimal learning environment. In this environment, students are eager to learn, willing to take risks and learn from their mistakes, free from unhealthy pressure, and evaluated by standards of competency that are clear and strong. The interpersonal setting of Plato's dialogue Parmenides illustrates this kind of environment:

After leaving our home at Clazomenae we arrived at Athens and met Adimantus and Glaucon in the market place. Adimantus took my hand. Welcome, Cephalus, he said. If there is anything we can do for you here, you must let us know.

Well, I replied, I have come for that very purpose. There is something you and your brother can do for me.

Please tell us what it is.

What, I asked, was the name of your half brother on the mother's side? He was only a child, you know, when I was here before, and that is a long while ago now. His father's name was Pyrilampes, I think.

Yes, and his own is Antiphon. But why do you ask?

My companions here, I answered, are fellow citizens of mine, deeply interested in philosophy. They have been told that Antiphon has been much in the company of someone called Pythodorus, who was a friend of Zeno's, and that Pythodorus has related to him that conversation which Socrates once had with Zeno and Parmenides. Antiphon is said to have heard it so often that he can repeat it by heart.

That is true.

Well, said I, that is what we want—to hear that conversation.

There is no difficulty about that, he replied. Before he was grown up, Antiphon worked at getting that conversation by heart, though nowadays he takes after his grandfather of the same name and devotes most of his time to horses. If you like, let us go and see him. He has just gone home from here. His house is close by, in Melite.

So we set out to walk there. We found Antiphon at home, giving instructions to a smith about making a bit or something of the sort. When he had done with the man, and his brothers began to tell him what we had come for, he recognized me from his memory of my earlier visit and said he was glad to see me. We then asked him to repeat the conversation. At first he was reluctant. It

was no easy matter, he said. However, he ended by telling us the whole story. (Hamilton and Cairns 921)

Later in the same dialogue, a young, eager and very forceful Socrates challenges the significance of a presentation by the older Zeno, a famous mathematician and a close friend of the great philosopher, Parmenides, who is also present and after whom the dialogue is named:

While Socrates was speaking, Pythodorus said he was expecting every moment that Parmenides and Zeno would be annoyed, but they listened very attentively and kept on exchanging glances and smiles in admiration of Socrates. When he ended, Parmenides expressed this feeling.

Socrates, he said, your eagerness for discussion is admirable. (Hamilton and Cairns 924)

People eager to learn travel to Athens to hear a famous conversation related from the memory of an old man who had heard it narrated from the memory of a younger man. Plato wrote the dialogue Parmenides including the narration of that same story from his own memory. Again, in Plato's view, learning without memory is impossible. But learning is also impossible without mutual respect and shared values of truth, clarity, consistency and completeness. Learning is impossible, moreover, without the leisure to converse, the willingness and ability to speak and to listen, the curiosity to ask questions, the eagerness to initiate and advance an inquiry, and the effort to maintain concentration, clarity and composure.

To Learn and To Teach

Parmenides, Zeno, Socrates and Plato heard the dao and lived to learn and to teach. Lao Tzu heard the dao and sketched it in terms of the discipline necessary for self-mastery and wisdom. Chaung Tzu forgot his true self, retired, completed his anamnesis then came out again to teach. He saw the possibility of his own physical death in the actual death of the cicada, the actual death of the mantis, the possible death of the bird by his own arrow, and the social death of lost face that would have followed upon his being seized by the gamekeeper and formally accused of poaching in a restricted area. He ran home to withdraw into the solitude necessary to generate the intensity required to kill the inattention through which he had endangered himself. He realized that forgetfulness of self, failure to follow the center, and inattention that slops from one mediocre distraction to another are dangerous.

His life is limited but knowledge is unlimited. His attention is limited but the possible distractions are unlimited. Therefore, to preserve life he must keep his attention away from the extremes that create imbalances in which a person is defenseless because they mire in ignorance and illusion. He must swallow the sword and lift the shield. This self-inflicted release prepares him to mediate the similar actions of his students.

The goal of teaching and learning in contemporary Taiwan ESL classrooms therefore cannot be the extreme of refined academic prose or the extreme of vulgar slang speech. Idiomatic English signifies the middle to which all kinds of English and all levels of English must return for authentication. It is this strong, robust and enduring center of English that ESL teachers must teach and students must learn.

Afterword

What other significance could this exploration have if not a timely anamnesis of the role of the teacher in contemporary Taiwan ESL classrooms? Who has forgotten what that role is? Who knew in the first place so that in some other place it could be forgotten? What is the it that was known or not known, forgotten or not forgotten? Not these words. These words are only traces in your audiovisual space. The spaces between these words, in hearing and in reading, blur, congeal, smooth then clear with the mirror of your mind. It is your attention, and only your attention, that is in question here.

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